Policy Matters

SUFA and Citizen Engagement:

Fake or Genuine Masterpiece?

Susan D. Phillips

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Summary

What we call the "social union" is not only about how governments deal with each other, but also about how they relate to citizens. It is about whether governments seek and consider the views of citizens in making public policy, whether they operate in an open and transparent manner, and how they hold themselves publicly accountable. The significance of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) is that it marks the first time that the federal and provincial governments have made explicit joint commitments about engaging citizens in the governing process. The importance of the citizen engagement provisions of SUFA should not be underestimated. The provisions stand on their own merit, but are also important because they are part of a shift to a new model of intergovernmental relations that might be called "instrumental federalism." This paper addresses how this new approach affects citizens and how effectively Canadian governments have met their commitments to citizen engagement under SUFA, using the National Children's Agenda as an example.

Instrumental federalism is a new approach to intergovernmental relations in several respects. First, it is an attempt to focus on problem-solving, or as the federal government sees it, "doing what works for Canadians," without being unduly hampered by jurisdictional boundaries. Second, perhaps even more essential than actually fixing policy problems is being seen to do so, in part by involving citizens in the policy process. The third and potentially most important element of instrumental federalism is accountability through outcomes-based measurement and public reporting. Under this new regime, citizens become the third force of federalism — not so much as a means of truly reducing the democratic deficit, but as an indirect vehicle for governments to hold each other accountable, something they cannot do directly in our federal system. Nevertheless very specific commitments to citizen engagement were set out in SUFA which, if implemented, could have a very positive impact on the relationship between civil society and governments.

The reality, however, is that both levels of government have failed miserably in meeting these commitments. One reason for this is that the provinces have no incentive to tie their citizen engagement activities to SUFA because, having jurisdiction over social policy, they have many opportunities to interact and create partnerships with the voluntary organizations which deliver services and the citizens who use them. They do not need SUFA to do this. Arguably, with varying degrees of interest and success, provincial governments are indeed doing more to encourage innovative and effective citizen engagement, but not in a way that is directly related to or prompted by SUFA.

It is the federal government that has the greater need for the type of citizen involvement promoted in SUFA, because one of its goals in a renewed social union is to build stronger and more direct relationships with citizens — relationships that bypass provincial governments. Yet the federal government has made little progress in this regard, impeded by a lack of commitment and imagination, a resistance to institutional change, and increased mobility within the public service that makes relationship-building with citizens difficult to sustain. As for the promise of citizen involvement in the review process that is to take place at the end of the third year under SUFA, it is unlikely to be particularly meaningful, since so little has been achieved.

So far, the only real impact of SUFA is on accountability regimes. The requirement that governments report on policy outcomes has been embedded in new federal-provincial-territorial agreements, such as the initiative on Early Childhood Development and the 2000 Health Accord. Although it is too early to expect governments to have actually produced results-based measurements, the eventual ability to compare outcomes across jurisdictions will be of some benefit in facilitating a public dialogue around social policy investment and in holding governments accountable for their program commitments. Outcomes are not a panacea, however. Measurement is in itself a challenge, and, if they are to be useful for accountability purposes, outcomes must be linked to specific programs. Finally, if citizens are to fulfil their instrumental new role in the federation, they will require considerable analytical expertise, access to government data and the creation of fora in which dialogue about outcomes can take place.

It is unrealistic to think that Canadian governments will be able to meet their citizen engagement commitments in any serious way before SUFA expires in February 2002. Perhaps the best hope for institutionalizing meaningful, deliberative citizen engagement in intergovernmental relations is that the existing provisions survive a renewal of SUFA, allowing a second round in which governments can put some real effort into the process.

Résumé

L'union sociale n'est pas seulement une question d'interaction entre les gouvernements, mais concerne aussi leurs rapports avec les citoyens, c'est-à-dire la façon dont ils prennent en considération l'avis des Canadiens dans l'élaboration de leurs politiques publiques, l'ouverture et la transparence dont ils font preuve dans la mise en œuvre de ces politiques ainsi que leur imputabilité. Sur ce plan, l'Entente-cadre sur l'union sociale (ECUS) constitue une première, car les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux n'avaient jamais auparavant pris d'engagement conjoint et formel d'impliquer les citoyens dans le processus politique. À cet égard, les dispositions de l'Entente sont très précises et, si elles étaient respectées, elles pourraient grandement améliorer les rapports entre la société civile et les gouvernements. En plus d'avoir leur propre mérite, ces dispositions sur la participation des citoyens sont d'intérêt parce qu'elles s'inscrivent dans un tournant vers un nouveau modèle de relations intergouvernementales qu'on pourrait qualifier de « fédéralisme instrumental ». La présente étude évalue le rôle des citoyens dans ce nouveau régime et si oui ou non nos gouvernements ont respecté les engagements pris dans le cadre de l'ECUS à ce chapitre, prenant pour ce faire l'exemple du Plan d'action national pour les enfants.

Le fédéralisme instrumental constitue à maints égards une nouvelle approche aux relations intergouvernementales. Tout d'abord on y met l'accent sur la résolution de problèmes, sur « ce qui marche pour les Canadiens », sans trop se soucier des compétences respectives des deux niveaux de gouvernement. Par ailleurs, la participation des citoyens au processus politique rend ces derniers plus conscients des efforts consacrés par les gouvernements à résoudre les problèmes, ce qui est peut-être aussi important que de savoir qu'ils ont été résolus. Enfin, l'utilisation de mesures de rendement de programmes et de rapports publics pour assurer une plus grande imputabilité des gouvernements constitue possiblement l'élément le plus important du fédéralisme instrumental. Dans le cadre de ce nouveau régime, les citoyens deviennent la troisième force du fédéralisme, non pas tant en vue de réduire le déficit démocratique que comme moyen de faire indirectement ce qui est impossible directement dans un système fédéral, c'est-à-dire inciter les gouvernements à répondre de leurs actions les uns envers les autres.

Hélas, le bilan des deux ordres de gouvernements aux cours des trois dernières années est lamentable, en raison notamment du fait que les provinces n'ont aucun intérêt à rattacher à l'ECUS leurs initiatives en matière de participation. Ayant en effet toute compétence sur les politiques sociales, elles ne manquent pas d'occasions d'interagir avec les citoyens ni de multiplier les partenariats avec les organismes de services ainsi qu'avec les usagers. Aussi n'ont-elles

aucun besoin de l'ECUS pour agir en ce sens. En fait, les provinces innovent davantage en matière de participation, bien que ce soit avec un intérêt et un succès variables, mais sans que leur action ne soit franchement liée à l'ECUS ou inspirée par elle.

En fait, c'est surtout le gouvernement fédéral qui a intérêt à encourager la participation des citoyens tel que prévu dans l'ECUS. L'un des principaux objectifs qu'il visait au départ à travers cette union sociale était justement de raffermir ses liens directs avec la population, sans l'entremise des provinces. Il a pourtant très peu progressé sur ce plan, faute de détermination et d'imagination, sans compter une résistance aux changements institutionnels et une mobilité accrue dans la fonction publique qui n'aident en rien au maintien de relations suivies avec les Canadiens. Compte tenu de ce bilan, il est fort peu probable que les promesses de faire participer les citoyens au processus de révision de l'entente, qui doit avoir lieu avant février 2002, aient toute la portée qu'on pourrait en attendre.

Par contre, le seul véritable impact de l'ECUS concerne la reddition de compte. En effet, l'obligation faite aux gouvernements de rendre compte des résultats de leurs politiques fait partie intégrante des récents accords fédéraux-provinciaux-territoriaux, comme l'Accord sur le développement de la petite enfance et l'Accord sur la santé, tous deux conclus à l'automne 2000. Quoiqu'il soit encore trop tôt pour qu'on puisse s'attendre à ce que les gouvernements aient déjà produit ce genre de bilan, il est certain que les comparaisons qu'on pourra effectuer entre toutes les juridictions, lorsqu'ils le feront, favoriseront le débat public sur les investissements sociaux et amélioreront sans doute l'imputabilité des gouvernements. Cette exigence de faire part des résultats atteints n'a toutefois rien d'une panacée. Mesurer les résultats est déjà tout un défi et, si nous souhaitons qu'ils soient d'une quelconque utilité en termes d'imputabilité, les résultats devront être rattachés à des programmes précis. De plus, pour que les citoyens soient en mesure de jouer pleinement leur nouveau rôle, ils auront besoin d'une plus grande expertise analytique, devront avoir accès aux données gouvernementales et cela exigera aussi que soit créée une véritable tribune de discussion.

Il est irréaliste de croire que les gouvernements canadiens pourront remplir leurs engagements en cette matière avant l'expiration de l'ECUS, en février 2002. En conséquence, le meilleur espoir d'institutionnaliser une réelle participation des citoyens consiste sans doute à reconduire les dispositions actuelles, ce qui offrirait aux gouvernements une seconde chance de tenir leurs promesses en y consacrant cette fois des efforts sérieux.

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Introduction

The idea of a renewed social union is as much about building stronger relationships between citizens and governments as it is about building more collaborative relationships among governments. One widely used definition of social union is that which "embodies our sense of collective responsibility (among citizens), our federalism pact (between and across regions), and our governance contract (between citizens and governments)."[1] The Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) marks the first time that the federal and provincial governments have made a joint commitment to engage citizens in the governing process. It not only is committed, according to its statement of principles, to ensuring that Canadians have "meaningful input into social policies and programs," but commits governments to report publicly on the outcomes of social programs and to provide "effective mechanisms for citizens to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes." Is SUFA a genuine move toward a deliberative form of democracy in which citizens are actively and meaningfully engaged in policy-making? To what extent are Canadian governments living up to the SUFA principles and promises on citizen engagement?

To fully understand the significance of SUFA, we must reject the traditional typologies used to describe federal-provincial relations, which focus on the degree of underlying conflict or cooperation.[2] We need to conceive of a new approach to federalism, one that involves citizens as well as governments, and does so in an instrumental manner. "Instrumental federalism," which emerged in the late 1990s and became enshrined in SUFA, focuses on the ability of governments to solve problems that matter to Canadians and to enhance policy learning through evaluation — and on the accountability of governments in these two respects. These goals derive directly from the philosophy of New Public Management (NPM). The notion of instrumentality is captured nicely by the Treasury Board Secretariat in its comment that the essence of SUFA is "doing what works for Canadians," rather than — it is implied — concentrating on (or being limited by) jurisdictional authority.[3] The approach embodied in SUFA is instrumental not only in getting results, but also in ultimately increasing the visibility and relevance of government and public trust in government. More importantly, all of these goals can serve to protect and promote the interests of individual governments within the federation.

Citizens are key to this process. Respect for the federal principle makes it difficult for governments to hold each other directly accountable for spending or for public policy. This is a particular concern for Ottawa, because the shift from cost-sharing and conditional funding to block transfers diminished its ability to influence provincial use of federal money. In instrumental federalism, citizens can hold governments to account based on public reporting of policy outcomes.

They serve as a foil against encroachment or inaction by other governments: for instance, vigilant citizens, armed with the knowledge that the federal government has unilaterally cut transfer payments, or that a provincial government is improperly allocating federal dollars earmarked for early childhood development, for example, can exert political pressure to force compliance. Another motivation for this new approach to federalism is the recognition that trust and confidence in government are declining and that Canadians want to be engaged in policy-making but feel excluded.[4] SUFA does include provisions for engaging citizens in policy at the level of each individual government, yet it makes no commitment with respect to opening up intergovernmental decision-making to greater public involvement.

So citizens are to be the third force in federalism — not so much as a means of creating a social union that truly addresses the democratic deficit that has been so widely deplored, but as a third-party barrier to the actions of one government against another.[5] For this reason, the citizen engagement and accountability provisions of SUFA go hand in hand. Although citizens were brought into SUFA first and foremost to act as watchdogs, their role was expanded by more positive commitments around public involvement in policy-making. Neither the federal nor provincial governments had any concrete plan at the time, however, as to how these commitments would be met. Therefore, these broader promises around citizen engagement can be read as largely symbolic — nice if they could be kept, but no effort expended to develop a strategy to do so.

Still, the fact remains that commitments to citizen engagement are set out in SUFA and, if met, could have a positive impact on the relationship between civil society and government. The reality, as we will see, is that both levels of government have failed miserably in keeping their promises.

Although governments have not, so far, lived up to their SUFA commitments, enormous benefit would be derived from expanding the role of citizens in the social union. We therefore begin by exploring the potential of meaningful citizen engagement that is based on a model of deliberative democracy. What does this concept mean, and what kinds of institutions and practices are needed to implement it? In particular, how might intergovernmental decision-making be made more accessible to citizens and their organizations? We then turn from the potential to the reality of SUFA, first examining its actual promises around citizen engagement, then attempting to explain why they are part of a new model of instrumental federalism. The third part of the paper focuses on implementation: after almost three years, what have governments done to meet the commitments made under SUFA to engage citizens? The National Children's Agenda (NCA), which has been declared a priority by federal and provincial governments alike and which represents the first SUFA-

influenced collaborative social policy effort, presents an opportunity to see how citizens and voluntary organizations have been engaged. Interestingly, although the engagement practices under the NCA fall far short of SUFA commitments, civil society has not been standing still, waiting to be asked to participate. In spite of limited publicity about SUFA, voluntary organizations have been improving their networks and orchestrating a greater role for citizens in the social union. The paper concludes that better organization and stronger leadership within civil society may make it increasingly difficult for governments to ignore their SUFA responsibilities even though, at present, they appear quite content to do so.

The Potential: Citizen Engagement and Intergovernmental Relations

In the context of intergovernmental relations, it matters both how and where the public is involved in policy-making. "How" refers to the goals and methods of such involvement, while "where" refers to its location — in individual jurisdictions or at the intergovernmental level.

From Consultation to Citizen Engagement

Citizen involvement in policy-making has long been seen as a continuum, ranging from the token one-way provision of information (for example, written material describing a proposed policy and soliciting comments) to an interactive, iterative two-way dialogue that has a genuine influence on policy. The term "citizen engagement" is now generally used to describe practices at this latter end of the continuum. Citizen engagement is informed by a conceptual model of "deliberative democracy." It is an interactive, deliberative dialogue between citizens (and/or their organizations) and government officials that contributes meaningfully to specific policy decisions in a transparent and accountable manner.[6] Somewhere between tokenism and citizen engagement lie the various types of episodic public "consultation" that both federal and provincial governments regularly host. They include public meetings, legislative hearings, multi-stakeholder roundtables and other one-off events. The problem with most of these mechanisms is that they are lopsided: government usually determines who is invited, there are few opportunities for a real exchange of views and genuine dialogue, and participants receive limited information on how the results are used. In addition, these forms of consultation seldom make an impact on civil society in terms of developing leadership skills, mobilizing the community or building social cap-

ital. Moreover, traditional consultation has gained a reputation in many communities as being little more than a "telling and selling" exercise — telling people about the government's policy choice and selling them on it.[7]

Citizen engagement is meant not simply to reproduce traditional forms of consultation, but to promote a more deliberative form of democracy. Cohen defines deliberative democracy as "a framework of social and institutional conditions that facilitates free discussion among equal citizens — by providing favourable conditions for participation, association and expression — and ties the authorization to exercise public power (and the exercise itself) to such discussion."[8] This concept has several implications for reform. First, deliberation does not entail just any discussion but refers to "free public reasoning among equals who are governed by the decision."[9] *Reasoning* is interactive and iterative by nature; the participants are prepared to be moved by reason and to abide by the results.[10] The notion of *free* reasoning suggests that the process is inclusive and participatory and that the parties are treated as equals. But citizen engagement as part of deliberative democracy goes further than reasoning, and it is this aspect that gives governments the most difficulty. The concept also suggests that the results of the process be given weight in collective decision-making and be used to guide subsequent action. This does not imply, in my view, that citizens (rather than elected officials) have the final say on policy, but it does require established and credible mechanisms, processes or protocols, in order for the results of such deliberation to have an institutionalized impact on political decision-making. In addition, citizens need to know they have influence and the extent of that influence.

Citizen engagement based on the deliberative democracy model has three distinct benefits for a renewed social union. First, it is capable of producing better policy. Over the past decade, the nature of governing has changed from the top-down, command-and-control model to a more horizontal style of governance that involves collaboration among governments and with the private and voluntary sectors in planning, designing and implementing policy.[11] Increased horizontality is not a passing fad but an adaptive response to a more diverse population with differing needs and expectations of the state — and with less trust in the state — and to a more complex policy environment where government is only part of the solution. Given that this transition from government to governance is taking place at the end of a fiscal crisis, not only has the process of governing changed, but so too has its scope. Even in an era of budget surpluses, governments are choosing to do less than they used to; they are sticking to their defined "core business" and leaving many societal needs to be met by families and communities.

By necessity, then, the contemporary style of governance is more embedded in civil institutions than the top-down style of governing. It requires that

policy-makers be knowledgeable about the needs and wants of partners and communities, that policy design benefit from the knowledge and expertise of the delivery agents (increasingly likely to be voluntary organizations), and that both the substance and the process of policy-making be seen as credible by the partners who may share some of the risks or be responsible for implementation.[12] Acquisition of such knowledge and credibility hinges on meaningful involvement of the partners and citizens at all stages of the policy process.

The second distinct benefit of citizen engagement is a more active citizenry and more vibrant civil society. As Anne Phillips notes, deliberation matters only because there is difference. The free reasoning involved in deliberation builds pressure for the inclusion of differences, thus contributing to a spirit of revived pluralism.[13] Deliberative democracy, it is argued, promotes active citizenship because it requires individuals and organizational representatives to become informed about issues, rather than merely taking immutable positions or offering ill-conceived opinions, and to participate in the dialogue. The act of participation fosters the honing of citizenship skills and the building of horizontal networks based on trust.[14]

The third distinct benefit accrues to government directly. Citizen engagement raises the visibility and, potentially, the credibility of the government among its governing partners and among the public. It may also enhance democratic practices within political institutions by opening up legislative and other decision-making processes to public scrutiny.

Truly deliberative forms of democracy cannot be created in an ad hoc manner but require several kinds of infrastructure. An obvious prerequisite is institutions or fora run by and for the public. A problem with existing forms of consultation is that the state usually reserves the power to determine who will be consulted. In deliberative fora, such as citizen panels or juries, participants are selected at random or, on a representative basis, by a third party.[15] In other models, such as the newly formed Civic Forum in Scotland, representatives of civil society associations are self-selected and thus have a sense of ownership of the engagement process and the deliberative institution.[16]

Even if the goal is to engage individual citizens, the process is facilitated by strong associational democracy — that is, by extensive and active networks of voluntary organizations that are run democratically and have well-developed memberships.[17] Voluntary organizations are critical to citizen engagement because they are expert in service delivery and know their communities. If voluntary organizations embody internal democracy and have active memberships, they are themselves sites of deliberation that allow citizens to acquire and practise citizenship skills. However, voluntary organizations can be effective only if they have the capacity to participate actively and to undertake their own policy analysis, which

in turn requires access to information, appropriate human and financial resources, and policy and technical expertise.[18] Finally, if indeed the goal of institutionalized citizen engagement is not to simply feed public opinion into the policy process, but to improve the relationship between governments and civil society, the state of that relationship must be monitored and made public.

Citizen Engagement in the Intergovernmental Context

Since citizen involvement can take place in various forms and at various levels, it can be useful to view it as on a continuum. From an intergovernmental perspective, participation can range from a process that is independent and contained within a single jurisdiction to one that is fully integrated within the machinery of intergovernmental decision-making. As Seidle observes, tentative steps have been taken in the direction of jointly led approaches to public involvement, with governments either establishing a common framework for engagement but conducting their own exercises, or jointly sponsoring and participating in consultative exercises.[19]

In practice, however, most of these joint exercises have been episodic, traditional types of consultation.[20] Indeed citizen engagement in intergovernmental decision-making remains extremely rare in Canada. As Mendelsohn and McLean

Table 1
Forms of Citizen Involvement in an Intergovernmental Context

Independent ———				——— **Intergovernmental**
Individual government initiative: independent of others	Involve representatives of other governments in independent processes	Agreed framework, independent processes	Jointly led processes	Intergovernmental, mechanisms attached to intergovernmental machinery
Examples:				
Common	National Forum on Health	Calgary Declaration	National Children's Agenda Canada Pension Plan Review	Rare National Children's Benefit Reference Group (now defunct) Aboriginal Working Group to the F/P/T Ministerial Council

argue, Canada lags considerably behind other federations in involving its citizens and voluntary organizations in intergovernmental processes.[21] A combination of factors have contributed to this situation. With the exceptional power of Canada's first ministers, the relatively weak position of legislators and the emphasis on party discipline, the negotiation of institutional interests has been the dominant style of intergovernmental relations.[22] The intergovernmental agenda is thus shaped largely by territorial interests, which leaves little room for groups that are not territorially based to exert their influence. Within the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministerial Council, intergovernmental specialists are assuming greater prominence, which tends to give precedence to matters of process and protection of governmental interests over matters of substance. To some extent as well, the organization of the voluntary sector has contributed to its own exclusion. There is no true peak association representing the sector, and in many policy fields there is both poor vertical integration of local, provincial and national organizations and poor cross-organizational contact at the regional level. This structure, coupled with a lack of resources, renders civil society unable to press governments sufficiently to open up intergovernmental relations to citizens and organizations.

Citizen engagement could be made integral to intergovernmental relations in a number of ways: civic fora comprising representatives of voluntary organizations engaged in policy development and service delivery;[23] citizen juries and panels; regular rather than one-off meetings with individuals and organizations on particular issues; involvement of representatives of national voluntary organizations in working groups under the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministerial Council;[24] and convening of regular meetings of the Ministerial Council and the Sectoral Tables with leaders from the voluntary sector on key issues. Effective citizen engagement requires not only the means for participatory policy-making, but also a transparent process and ongoing review of the mechanisms to that effect. Lazar suggests an approach whereby each signatory would establish a legislative committee on the social union — a process that would also involve federal and provincial legislators more effectively.[25] Each committee would be expected to hold regular public hearings to review its jurisdiction's compliance with SUFA. Another approach would be to follow the monitoring practices of the framework agreement, or "compact," in the United Kingdom between the Blair government and the voluntary sector. Its innovation is to convene an annual joint meeting of senior ministers and leaders from the voluntary sector for the purposes of: (1) preparing, for presentation to Parliament, an annual report on government and voluntary-sector adherence to the compact and on the general state of the relationship; and (2) producing an action plan that sets out steps for improving the relationship in the coming year.

The creation of new institutions for citizen engagement in the intergovernmental realm would not strip ministers of their ability to bargain behind closed doors or their ultimate decision-making power. Nor would the input of citizens and voluntary organizations replace the expertise of government officials. Rather, executive bargaining would have the benefit of ongoing dialogue with *additional* experts — those who are knowledgeable about local communities and about service delivery in those communities.

The SUFA Promise on Citizen Engagement

SUFA is a product of negotiations over an 18-month period and thus is an agreement forged of compromise. The process included both interprovincial discussions to develop a common position and federal-provincial negotiation. The provinces took the lead by creating the Provincial/Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal in 1995 and in reaching a consensus, which included Quebec, made public at the 1998 Premiers' Conference in Saskatoon (the Saskatoon Consensus). The full details of this consensus were elaborated in the Victoria Proposal released in January 1999.[26] During this period the federal government also laid out some of its key positions, in a two-part document, *Working Together for Canadians*, released in July 1998 and January 1999. In closed-door negotiations, with an offer by the Prime Minister to boost health-care funding, a final agreement was reached in early February 1999 that saw the provinces make major compromises — compromises that were too great for Quebec to accept. Although the negotiations were not open to the public, a sense of which parts of SUFA were critically important to whom, and how ideas evolved, can be gleaned by comparing the earlier positions with the wording of the final Agreement.[27]

SUFA mentions or has implications for citizen engagement in five contexts. The most important and most concrete directly addresses participation in policy. This occurs in two places. The first is under the opening section on principles, which encourages governments, within their respective constitutional jurisdictions, to follow the principle of ensuring "appropriate opportunities for Canadians to have meaningful input into social policies and programs." This principle, which does not appear in earlier provincial statements, reflects Ottawa's concern with building social capital and social cohesion, a concern that dates from the mid-1990s when a few centrally placed individuals in the Prime Minister's Office, Privy Council Office and key departments saw the need to engage citizens as a way of building a stronger, more cohesive society and restoring trust in government.[28]

Although this provision could be a powerful means of enhancing citizen engagement, since it requires that such engagement be *meaningful*, its impact is diluted because it appears as only a guiding principle rather than a commitment to action. It is reinforced, however, by a subsequent commitment modelled on a clause in the Victoria Proposal, to "ensure effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes."[29] The strength of this statement lies in the agreement to provide actual mechanisms, not mere opportunities. Its limitation is that the commitment applies to only the front end of establishing priorities and the back end of reviewing outcomes, and says nothing about actually involving citizens in policy development, design or implementation. For the provinces, however, specifying participation in priority-setting may not have been seen as a limitation at all; such involvement could potentially be used as a counterweight against federal meddling in provincial matters through use of the spending power to establish programs desired by Ottawa.

Yet as a means of facilitating citizen engagement this clause does indeed have limitations. The reality of priority-setting is that it is always an inherently political process and thus one that executives are reluctant to give up. While governments frequently do consult to assess underlying public values, and regularly commission public opinion polls to determine "top-of-mind" issues, they are unlikely to put themselves in a position of being bound, even morally, to engage in a process of public engagement that has real influence in priority-setting. In the intergovernmental realm, the reality of collective priority-setting also reflects the dominance of a politics of pragmatism: the overall priorities are not set by a single jurisdiction, but are negotiated; they become what most governments are willing to accept both in principle and in practice, once funding and other strings are attached. At the end of this process, priorities may or may not mirror the issues of greatest importance to citizens.[30] In effect, then, the SUFA provision is probably limited to engaging citizens in the review process.

The statement of principles offers a second kind of support for citizen involvement, related to strengthening civil society more generally. Governments agree to "promote the full and active participation of all Canadians in Canada's social and economic life" and to "work in partnership with individuals, families, communities, voluntary organizations, business and labour."[31] Both statements signal a recognition that in collaborative forms of governance, now more than ever, governments need the voluntary and private sectors as partners, and that an active citizenry and a vibrant civil society contribute positively to governance. However, the wording of the first statement is sufficiently broad to be read as largely symbolic, while the wording of the second is so general as to be mean-

ingless — it would be difficult to find an instance of a contemporary government *not* working in some kind of partnership.

The third way in which SUFA brings citizens into federal-provincial relations is through accountability, an idea that, in wedding NPM to federalism, has resonance with both the federal and provincial governments. Once Ottawa decided to come to the table, as Lazar observes, it bargained hard for public accountability as a way of pressing the provinces to fulfil their social policy obligations.[32] In principle, the provinces had already accepted — indeed developed — the idea of public accountability, in the Victoria Proposal, albeit with significant differences in perspective from that of the federal government.[33] In both the federal and provincial takes on it, accountability requires a vigilant citizenry. Under the section "Informing Canadians," each signatory agrees to "monitor and measure outcomes of its social programs and report regularly to its constituents on the performance of these programs" and to use third parties, as appropriate, in assessing progress. It should be noted that the reporting is on outcomes, not mere outputs or activities, and that, in respect of constitutional jurisdiction, provinces are to report to their own constituencies, not to the federal government. As Lazar notes, "Over time, it is anticipated that different governments will use comparable indicators to measure progress so that this flow of information to the public will enable those who are interested to compare results in their jurisdiction to results in other jurisdictions."[34] Ottawa's initial intention, as laid out in *Working Together*, would have gone much further in standardizing and centralizing this process, by having sectoral ministers develop uniform accountability frameworks and comparable indicators, articulate best practices and methods for citizen participation, and establish third-party social audits.[35]

Ottawa's desire to embrace more results-based federalism is motivated by several factors. First, it is compatible with events within the federal government in recent years. In line with NPM philosophy, attention has been increasingly focused on outcomes and service standards, as demonstrated by the results-based management process led by the Treasury Board Secretariat.[36] The focus on public reporting of results, in the intergovernmental context, is a way of holding the provinces responsible for how they spend federal transfers. Although there was some accountability for social spending under the cost-shared Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) — the monies had to be spent on social assistance and spending had to meet a few minimal conditions — under block funding it is impossible for Ottawa to require that the provinces meet any particular standards of service, or indeed that they use the transfer on the nominally designated purpose at all. The SUFA accountability provisions are intended to give the public and civil society organizations the information on outcomes they require for vig-

ilance, pressing underperforming provinces to direct spending towards social programs and to design more effective programs.

The provinces had also embraced the idea of public accountability in the Victoria Proposal, but with important caveats with respect to autonomy and independence. They would develop their own indicators, and accountability would be linked to a rationalization of responsibilities in the federation through reduction of overlap and duplication.[37] Their goals in supporting public accountability were similar to those of the federal government — to use the threat of public censure to ensure that Ottawa lived up to its funding commitments. What the provinces lost in the final agreement was a measure of reciprocal transparency: a clause requiring the federal government to report publicly, on an annual basis, on its provision of adequate and stable program funding did not survive.

The fourth provision is another dimension of promoting greater public accountability. Under the heading "Ensuring Fair and Transparent Practices," governments committed "to have in place appropriate mechanisms for citizens to appeal unfair administrative practices and bring complaints about access and service." If implemented, this measure would not only replace, but extend to other areas, the appeal provisions of CAP that were lost when it was rolled into the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1995. An appeals process is particularly important given the downloading of services to voluntary organizations that has occurred over the past decade. In many service areas there are multiple providers but no designated coordinator — and governments have in many cases absented themselves from this role — so that a person in need of a service may not know how to access it. With multiple service providers, there may also be considerable differentiation in the way users are treated. As with public reporting, an appeals process is fully compatible with NPM philosophy, which espouses service standards (although not on a national basis) and government accountability for failure to serve *consumers* according to their expectations.

The final element is an explicit promise to involve citizens and their organizations in a review of the Agreement at the end of its initial three years, by ensuring "significant opportunities for input and feed-back from Canadians and all interested parties, including social policy experts, private sector and voluntary organizations." So far, virtually nothing appears to be happening on this front. With just a few months to go before renewal, any serious attempt at providing "significant opportunities" should be underway and announced, to give individuals and organizations time to assess, reflect and respond.[38]

In all of these elements SUFA is carefully worded. Use of the ambiguous term "Canadians" in the key commitments leaves one wondering whether this means individual citizens only or organizations as well. Over the course of the

1990s, many Canadian governments attempted to reorient consultative participation away from organizations and towards individuals.[39] This shift was partly driven by a desire to engage citizens in civic life. It also grew out of the populism that led to the founding of the Reform Party and that favours direct relationships between citizens and elected officials, without the filter of intermediary organizations. A third impetus was the negative response to public-sector restructuring, which led many Canadian governments to conclude that they should neither fund nor provide opportunities for their critics.[40] Although it has recently been acknowledged that much can be learned from civil society organizations, governments are still struggling to engage individuals as well. The question is whether SUFA would, mistakenly in my view, limit engagement to citizens representing only themselves, or would also welcome representatives of organizations. Although pains have been taken to avoid specific mention of organizations, the language is sufficiently inclusive to embrace processes that involve either organizations and individuals or organizations exclusively.

Citizen Engagement Under Instrumental Federalism

The significance of SUFA's citizen engagement provisions should not be underestimated, because they are indicative of a shift to a new mode of federalism that I will call "instrumental federalism." This instrumental character derives from four elements. The first is problem-solving that may require greater collaboration among governments and that, from the federal perspective, should not be unduly hampered by jurisdictional boundaries. It also promotes policy learning through information sharing and identifying best practices among governments. Although the notion of governments "getting along and doing good" is an attractive one, problem-solving is potentially an abrogation of the federal principle, as Quebec quickly realized. Rather than constraining Ottawa's use of the spending power, as the provinces had intended, instrumental federalism has facilitated what Noël calls "politically palatable spending" — boutique programs for popular causes such as reducing homelessness or supporting innovations that can be controlled by the Department of Finance and are often not subject to Cabinet decision-making.[41]

Perhaps even more important than actually fixing policy problems is being seen to do so. In the late 1990s, public opinion polls commissioned by various Canadian governments demonstrated quite dramatically that public trust and confidence in government (at all levels) were declining.[42] Gaining visibility and getting credit for programs that are important to Canadians, particularly health care, have thus become a major preoccupation of both federal and provincial governments.

The third element of instrumental federalism is accountability through outcomes-based measurement and public reporting. It was through this door of accountability that citizens were brought into the initial provincial and federal proposals put forward during the SUFA negotiations. The provinces saw public reporting as a means of ensuring that the federal government maintained stable and adequate transfers, while Ottawa saw it as a means of ensuring that the provinces spent transfers as intended. The main implication of the SUFA accountability provisions is to place the onus on citizens, unrealistically in my opinion, to review outcomes, assess their meaning, compare them across provinces and take political action to achieve better results. In effect, it makes social scientists of us all. This is unrealistic not because citizens are apathetic or not up to the task. Outcome measurement is a complex task and public debate about it requires access to relevant data and technical information, the ability to assess the quality of measurement as well as institutional venues for debate on the adequacy and policy implications of the data.

Finally, citizen involvement in policy-making has a key role in instrumental federalism because it is a means of both building trust in government and facilitating policy learning. Citizen participation is of particular interest to Ottawa because it is a way of establishing direct relations with Canadians, without mediating them through provincial governments. Given that the federal government's role in social policy is based on funding rather than direct service delivery, it appears remote and irrelevant to citizens in most parts of the country. By engaging citizens in policy, Ottawa gains a degree of public relevance, which could have positive effects for national unity should relationships with provincial governments sour or should Quebec sovereignty become an immediate issue once again.

The form of federalism embedded in SUFA differs from collaborative federalism in that citizens are the essential third force. The primary objective in elevating citizens to a new status is not to enhance democratic practices directly, and it is surely not to open up intergovernmental relations to greater public involvement. Rather, the goals of citizen engagement are instrumental, that is to serve the interests of governments in protecting themselves and their responsibilities in the federation against the actions of other governments.

When Potential Meets Reality

To what extent have the SUFA provisions, as a package, contributed to the development of genuine, institutionalized forms of citizen engagement? Although some are evidently limited in scope due to compromise, the commitments could,

if properly and enthusiastically implemented, promote deliberative forms of citizen engagement and stronger relationships between civil society and governments. There is little likelihood of this happening, however, for several reasons.

Neither Ottawa nor the provinces have shown any enthusiasm for keeping the SUFA promise to ensure meaningful public input into social policy. After almost three years under SUFA there are still no concrete plans to develop the requisite institutions or mechanisms for meaningful citizen engagement. As Lazar observed shortly after SUFA was announced, there is "no evidence that signatory governments have a blueprint up their sleeves for improving democratic processes in relation to the social union."[41] Nor is there any evidence that governments have attempted to involve citizens in "developing social priorities" under SUFA. The initiative on early childhood development announced in late 2000, for example, was determined to be a priority through the normal mechanisms of executive federalism, rather than being a product of dialogue with citizens. Nor has there been any progress in establishing transparent processes of public appeal against unfair administrative practices or lack of access to services.

The provinces are not highly motivated to comply with or tie their citizen engagement activities to SUFA: with jurisdiction over social policy, they have many opportunities to interact and build partnerships with the voluntary organizations that deliver services and with the users of those services; they do not need SUFA to engage citizens in policy or to form relationships with them. Arguably, provincial governments are involved in more innovative and effective citizen engagement, but not in ways that are directly connected to or prompted by SUFA. The extent of provincial interest in enhancing citizen engagement and establishing partnerships with voluntary organizations varies enormously, however.[42] At one end of the spectrum are Newfoundland, which has recently developed a Strategic Social Plan that embodies partnership with community organizations and that provides for a social audit, and Quebec, which has developed a comprehensive plan for the engagement and funding of community organizations. Other provinces have mechanisms for the participation of individuals and voluntary organizations in policy development in particular areas. Saskatchewan's advisory council on children and family services, for instance, brings together representatives of community service providers and consults regularly with the provincial government.[43] At the other extreme is Ontario, whose government has a highly centralized political decision-making process concentrated in the Premier's Office and has displayed little interest in engaging civil society in policy. Given these differences, we are unlikely to see any united provincial front in implementing SUFA citizen engagement commitments or holding governments accountable for their failure to do so.

The federal government has a greater need for the type of citizen involvement suggested by SUFA, because one of its goals in a renewed social union is to build stronger direct relationships with citizens and in the process bypass provincial governments. Such direct links are expected to not only promote trust in the federal government, but also buttress national unity regardless of its relations with the provinces. Yet the federal government's progress on citizen engagement has been impeded by a lack of both time and imagination and by an increased mobility within the public service that makes relationship-building with citizens difficult to sustain. Innovation on a procedural level is hindered by the grip of the Ottawa communications industry on the means of consultation: there is a more or less entrenched template for conducting consultations that in recent years has not prompted much innovation. To the extent that effective citizen engagement requires new mechanisms or institutions, or the reform of existing ones, the process is hampered by the Chrétien government's firm resistance to institutional change.[46]

In contrast, the accountability aspects of SUFA have been taken more seriously, although a few consecutive years of budget surplus have significantly altered both the incentive to involve citizens in accountability exercises and the consequences of doing so. The particular set of political circumstances that motivated the provinces to enter into a federal-provincial agreement in the first place centred on the need to constrain the use of the spending power, so that Ottawa could not entice the provinces into new spending programs and then, in times of restraint, unilaterally cut funding and leave them holding the financial bag and dealing with public criticism.[47] In this context, the idea of public reporting and rendering of accounts for the modification of existing programs and their funding, coupled with commitments to clearly state the roles and responsibilities of each order of government, was attractive to the provinces.[48] The federal government was even more strongly disposed to outcome-based accountability, reflecting its internal push for results-based management led by the Treasury Board Secretariat. Now that federal transfers have been restored, however, the provinces have less to gain through such reporting than Ottawa. With the CHST topped up and additional resources in place for special initiatives, it would be easy for the federal government to say, "we put up the money as promised; if things did not turn out as expected, blame the provinces."

Although many provinces are set on developing their own outcome measures, and some, such as Alberta, are far ahead of the federal government, there is a reluctance to provide truly comparable measures if there is a possibility these will be used by Ottawa to redistribute transfers or impose standardized measurement in a way that violates provincial autonomy and ignores local differ-

ences."[9] In addition, outcome measurement of social policies has proven to be much more complex in practice than in concept, and citizens and voluntary organizations are extremely limited in their ability to be effective watchdogs. Even for those jurisdictions that favour outcome measurement, at least on their own terms, such assessment has so far succeeded largely in measuring outputs, not outcomes. In addition, the difficulty of relating outcomes to particular programs should not be underestimated. For instance, it is one thing to collect data on literacy rates or child health and quite another to make the case that changes in these rates are the result of specific programs for early childhood development. Furthermore, many complicating factors, such as degree of urbanization and basic demographic profiles, might render the comparison of broad population-based measures a poor indicator of the effectiveness of provincial spending and programming. Consequently, while measurement and public reporting mechanisms *are* being established, the process is taking longer than initially imagined.

Finally, it can be argued that some of the disappointment in SUFA is the result of the expectations it had raised. It was widely assumed that SUFA would impel an opening of the intergovernmental process to citizens and civil society organizations (although this was never actually promised). Virtually no movement has occurred in this direction. In particular, with the exception of some participation by national Aboriginal organizations, the Ministerial Council and the Sectoral Tables remain as closed as ever to non-governmental actors. This can be attributed to the longstanding fear of ministers and the intergovernmental specialists who are part of the machinery of executive federalism that citizen involvement will limit their ability to set priorities and bargain effectively. It is my contention, however, that citizen engagement will not reach its full potential until it takes place in the intergovernmental realm as well as within individual governments.

Where does this leave the process of implementation of SUFA's commitments to citizen engagement? Far from its potential. It leaves the review of outcome measures and the possible involvement of citizens in the three-year review of SUFA itself as the most likely prospects. Four elements are required for effective use of outcome measurement and establishment of a related deliberative dialogue. First, voluntary organizations must have the opportunity to draw on their expertise in service delivery and knowledge of local communities and help define appropriate measures. Second, the measures must be open to public scrutiny. This implies that voluntary organizations or other third parties have the means to collect independent data or have access to government data and methods of collection and analysis for the purposes of review, and also possess the expertise to conduct their own assessment. Few civil society organizations and even fewer individuals have such expertise and resources. Third, a way has to be found to

link outcome measurement to programming and funding, which involves access to additional information on program inputs and activities, and requires sophisticated analysis. Finally, even if appropriate outcome measures are achieved, fora will have to be established for discussion and deliberation of their implications. In sum, reviews of outcomes may be possible in theory, but they are extremely difficult to achieve in practice.

Whether Canadian governments will scramble at the last minute to involve individuals and voluntary organizations in the three-year review remains an open question, but they have done nothing so far to provide the "significant opportunities" promised. A few regional meetings, a 1-800 phone line and some workbooks do not constitute meaningful engagement. Rather, they are a poignant illustration of how ill-prepared governments are to take citizen engagement seriously in the intergovernmental context. Further, given that few serious efforts have been made to fulfil the commitments made under SUFA, no rational government is likely to be enthusiastic about a meaningful, open review process. Nor are citizens likely to have much to say, since so little has happened.

A Test Case: The National Children's Agenda

The National Children's Agenda (NCA) that was announced in 1999 and the subsequent Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) that flows from it represent the first test of the impact of SUFA on social policy.[50] They are also a good test of the real interests of Canadian governments in citizen engagement under SUFA, because in most provinces the delivery of child and family services is largely the responsibility of voluntary organizations and because parents, who may well count themselves as experts on the matter of children, have a great deal to contribute to policy discussion on the subject. This is also an area in which federalism accommodates highly divergent systems of service delivery across provinces, especially in the provision of child care.[51] The provinces not only vary greatly on the mix of state, not-for-profit and commercial provision of services, but have a range of mechanisms for engaging providers and citizens in policy dialogue, with some provinces — notably Saskatchewan and Quebec — producing extensive engagement and other provinces very little.[52]

Admittedly, the initial steps towards the development of the NCA predate SUFA. In January 1997 the Ministerial Council requested that governments begin exploring possibilities for jointly developing a broad agenda and comprehensive strategy aimed at improving the well-being of children.[53] The premiers expressed strong support for this initiative at their annual summer meeting. In December

1997 the First Ministers with the exception of the Quebec delegation affirmed their commitment to developing a National Children's Agenda and agreed to fast-track the groundwork through the Ministerial Council. In May 1999 their commitment was formalized by the Ministerial Council with the release of the statement *Developing a Shared Vision*.[54] This document sets out broad values and four goals with respect to children: promoting health, ensuring safety and security, fostering successful learning and encouraging social engagement and responsibility.[55] However, it does not offer specific means for meeting these goals.

In the spring and summer of 1999 the federal and provincial/territorial governments sponsored a nationwide consultation on the NCA, coordinated at the national, provincial and territorial levels.[56] The process consisted of roundtables (of selected voluntary organizations and researchers) and focus groups (including members of the public) in five cities; a 1-800 phone number; a workbook to provide feedback; a national workshop of professionals, academics and representatives of the five national Aboriginal organizations to discuss outcome measurement and monitoring; and additional meetings organized by individual jurisdictions. In other words, it was a consultation as conventional as any other in the previous decade, and the results — or "what was said" — were reported in the federal government's usual vague manner.[57] Initial feedback from voluntary organizations and individuals on the vision was generally positive. Lacking detail, however, it could not go very far.

The federal government signalled its continued support for the NCA in the 1999 Speech from the Throne, indicating that a federal-provincial-territorial agreement on a national action plan on early childhood development, consistent with SUFA, would be in place by December 2000.[58] Ottawa and the provinces (but without Quebec) issued a communiqué on their intention to pursue what would become the ECDI two months early, backed by a federal commitment of $2.2 billion (about $100 per child) over five years starting in 2001–02.[59] Under the agreement, the provinces/territories have undertaken to invest in four general areas: promotion of healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improved parenting and family supports; strengthening of early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthening of community supports.[60] Within these areas, the provinces/territories will determine their own priorities and configuration of services. Congruent with SUFA, they have agreed to establish a baseline of current expenditures and activities on early childhood development, report annually to their publics on their investments, and develop a shared framework for reporting on outcomes that includes comparable indicators of both outputs (such as the growth of programs) and outcomes (such as the proportion of children who are ready to learn when they start school).[61] The agreement clearly

states that the amount of federal funding provided to any jurisdiction will not be based on performance.

How does the NCA score on SUFA's citizen engagement components? In terms of priority-setting, it cannot be said that under the NCA citizens were effectively engaged in the process. To be fair, the NCA was well underway before SUFA was finalized. Nevertheless, the announcement, a year and a half into the SUFA era, that the priority would be early childhood development came not from the consultation process but from governments directly. They had already determined that this would be the focus, partly because research findings showed the importance of children's early years for long-term outcomes.[62] An additional political advantage of this decision is that the focus on early childhood development enables governments to submerge or even sidestep direct discussion of child care as a priority, since some provincial governments want no part of a national strategy aimed at child care. It was unlikely that even if child care had emerged as a major concern in the consultations it would have been embedded in the ECDI as an explicit priority. In sum, priority-setting has, evidently, remained a political, executive process.

The NCA also gets failing marks on the SUFA principle of ensuring that Canadians have meaningful input into policy. Although in its early stages the NCA featured consultation, and although this was jointly sponsored — itself an innovation — it was a traditional consultation rather than a truly deliberative engagement. The results were badly analyzed and poorly reported, and could not possibly have contributed in any meaningful way to policy or program development. Moreover, there is no sign that governments are interested in establishing a civic forum or any other ongoing deliberative mechanism for engaging the voluntary organizations that are involved in service delivery. In public accountability, however, real gains have been made. Although it is too early to tell how enthusiastically the provinces/territories will pursue the development of *comparable* indicators, particularly in the area of child care where the differences are considerable, they have at least agreed to collect and report this information. Appropriately, the ECDI makes it clear that the provinces/territories are reporting the measures to their constituencies, not to the federal government. If outcome measurement is to truly enable policy learning and guide investment and policy design, and if citizens are to be a central part of this process, the next step is to create mechanisms for voluntary organizations, individuals and academics to discuss the meaning and implications of these measures. In addition, a joint federal-provincial-territorial review process to determine how measures might be gradually refined would facilitate good data collection.

More interesting than limited intergovernmental attempts at engagement under the NCA is the quiet, behind-the-scenes work, assisted by federal funding,

to develop better civil society networks and improve public vigilance. The policy community around children's issues historically has not been particularly cohesive, its membership fragmented by both geography and diversity of interests. Child and family policy encompasses a wide range of policy issues including health, education, justice, child care and disability. Although most of these areas are served by national umbrella organizations, both policy development and service delivery are concentrated at the provincial and municipal levels. Given the sparse resources and the multitude of organizations involved, advocates have had difficulty mobilizing at all three levels of government as well as across policy fields. Although many children's advocacy groups received federal funding in the 1970s and 1980s under Secretary of State and National Health and Welfare programs, most of this support was withdrawn in the mid-1990s due to financial restraint and a reluctance by the state to fund its critics.[63] In the mid-1990s, following the failure of a second national child-care strategy and after federal funding had begun targeting "children at risk," national organizations devoted to child and family issues saw that the only way to maintain support for the notion of universal access to services was to increase the bandwidth of the message — that is, to establish a more collective and comprehensive position.[64] They formed two broad coalitions, with some overlapping membership. Campaign 2000, comprising more than 70 national, provincial and community organizations, is concerned primarily with reducing child poverty. The National Children's Alliance was formed by some 30 organizations in 1996 for the express purpose of advancing a broad-based children's agenda. As intergovernmental interest in a national children's agenda began to develop, Ottawa deemed it useful to have a sounding board and support for such an agenda in civil society — preferably a political actor with more of a professional than radical approach to this issue. Its choice was the relatively conservative National Children's Alliance, an organization that has since received substantial federal funding.

Federal support has enabled the Alliance to hold its own series of consultations with regional and local organizations, to build nationwide networks, to increase the coalition's policy and analysis capabilities, and to become more institutionalized by hiring a full-time coordinator. Over the next few years the Alliance intends to direct its energies towards having a voice in the government's choice of indicators, holding the government to account on measurement and reporting outcomes and ensuring that individuals and voluntary organizations are engaged in implementing the EDCI.[65] This fits nicely with Ottawa's goal of using citizens as watchdogs — that is, of equipping civil society to do indirectly what, due to the sensitivity of intergovernmental relations, it could not do directly. Fortunately, there are benefits for civil society as well. It will be interesting to

see whether the government remains willing to support the coalition should it become critical of federal funding and policy, or whether it will withdraw funding as it did in the 1980s and 1990s.

Conclusion

Since the signing of the SUFA in 1999, there have been significant developments in how Canadian governments relate to civil society and in the potential for citizen engagement in policy-making. None of these developments has taken place in the arena of intergovernmental relations, however, and none has been directly driven by SUFA. So far, SUFA's only real impact has been in the area of accountability. Its requirement that governments report on policy outcomes has been embedded in new federal-provincial agreements, such as the ECDI and 2000 Health Accord, negotiated under the SUFA banner. Although it is too early for governments to have actually produced results-based measurements, the eventual comparison of outcomes across jurisdictions will be of some benefit in facilitating public dialogue around social policy investment and in holding governments accountable for their commitments. Outcomes measurement cannot guarantee enhanced accountability and citizen engagement, however. If this exercise is to be meaningful and useful, it must be possible for outcomes to be linked to inputs and outputs — that is, to spending and specific programs. Measurement and interpretation of outcomes is a challenge in itself. If individuals and organizations are to have an effective role in reviewing outcomes, they will need considerable analytical expertise and access to provincial data on measurement methods, as well as data on spending and programming, in order to evaluate the appropriateness and accuracy of the measures and assess their implications for social policy. This is no small task. If citizens are to play the role of watchdog in instrumental federalism, the voluntary sector will have to be strengthened and fora will have to be established to accommodate dialogue on outcomes. On a positive note, in areas such as children's policy Ottawa has begun to once again provide civil society organizations the funding they need to participate in the debate on what in fact constitutes appropriate indicators.

In spite of the relative lack of citizen engagement under SUFA, many governments across the country have begun to develop more positive relationships with citizens and the voluntary sector. They have used means such as strategic social planning, citizen-based summits, framework agreements with the voluntary sector based on mutual expectations and strengthening of civil society organizations. Independent of government, the voluntary sector has, in many

cities and provinces, begun to coalesce and to play a leadership role;[66] in the past year alone, for example, many coalitions representing a broad cross-section of organizations have emerged.[67] If civil society continues to organize and to develop its leadership capabilities, governments will find it increasingly difficult to ignore voluntary organizations and to walk away from their commitments to citizen engagement. Thus, pressure to fulfil the SUFA promises on citizen engagement is likely to come from the bottom up, financially supported and partly enabled by government. Such a process takes time, however, and the clock may run out on SUFA before any bottom-up influence can be exerted.

Since it is difficult for governments to reject public involvement, perhaps the best hope for the institutionalization of meaningful, deliberative citizen engagement in intergovernmental relations is if the existing provisions survive the three-year review of SUFA. This would give current efforts within civil society, and current federal and provincial exercises in relationship-building with the voluntary sector time to pay off, and would give civil society time to develop the capability and connections necessary to see that the potential for a more inclusive, deliberative process of policy-making and of intergovernmental relations is reached. Only in this way will a masterpiece of deliberative democracy be created from the blank canvas of SUFA.

Notes

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1 Biggs (1996, p. 1).

2 For some of the classical work on this, see Smiley (1979, pp. 105–113); and Simeon (1972).

3 Treasury Board Secretariat (1998).

4 For a summary see Graves (1999, pp. 37-73). Public attitudes towards government and citizen participation became a hot topic in Ottawa when Ekos Research began conducting an annual panel survey, *Rethinking Government*, in the mid-1990s, followed by *Rethinking Citizen Engagement*. For a comparative analysis of levels of trust see Pharr and Putnam (2000).

5 On the democratic deficit, see Maxwell (2001).

6 Graham and Phillips (1998); Abele et al. (1998); and Mendelsohn and McLean (2000*a*, p. 9).

7 Graham and Phillips (1998).

8 Cohen (1997, p. 412).

9 Cohen (1998, p. 186).

10 There is an active debate around whether deliberative democracy must be based solely on reasoning, or if other forms of communication can contribute legitimately. See Dryzek (2000, pp. 67-74). The emphasis on reasoning is, in my view, meant to indicate that deliberation, in the context of policy-making, involves problem-solving and thus persuasion through argumentation. I use the concept of reasoning not to stress the rationality of the process, but in terms of arriving at "public judgement," in Yankelovich's language, by connecting knowledge of tradeoffs with underlying values. See Yankelovich (1992, pp. 102-108).

11 For this and similar definitions of governance, see Rhodes (1996, pp. 652-667); Paquet (2000, pp. 119-124).

12 Christiano argues that deliberative democracy has an impact at the societal level as well, because societies that engage in a great deal of sincere public discussion on the merits of alternative proposals tend to be more just and more protective of liberty. See Christiano (1997, p. 244).

13 Phillips (1995, p. 151); and Schlosberg (1998, p. 605). The concept of social capital has been popularized by Putnam (2000).

14 Putnam (1993).

15 For an overview of citizen juries and panels see Abele et al. (1998). See also Fishkin (1995).

16 Phillips (forthcoming).

17 For a discussion of "thick" democracy see Mansbridge (1983); and Barber (1984). Concern about voluntary organizations without members is expressed in Skocpol (1999, pp. 66-73).

18 "Capacity" in the voluntary sector is described in Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector (1999).

19 Seidle (2000).

20 Julie Simmons argues that ministerial councils outside of social services, particularly the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and the Canadian Council of Forestry Ministers, have gone further in encouraging citizen participation. Simmons (forthcoming).

21 Mendelsohn and McLean (2000*b*, p. 23).

22 Mendelsohn and McLean (2000*b*, p. 23).

23 For a discussion of the possible use of civic fora in intergovernmental relations, see Phillips with Echenberg (2000).

24 Such engagement is not without precedent in intergovernmental relations. Under the NCA, representatives of the five national Aboriginal organizations are included in a working group under the Ministerial Council, and in December 1999 the first-ever joint meeting of the Ministerial Council and the national organizations was held. See Prince

(2000, pp. 45-46). There is good reason for separate meetings with Aboriginal leaders given the distinctive issues of children's policy in their communities, and much could be learned through engagement of representatives and members of other communities as well.

25 Lazar (2000*a*, p. 109).

26 This period is recounted in more detail by Gagnon and Segal (2001, pp. 1-7); and by Simmons (forthcoming).

27 This comparison is made in a systematic way for various parts of SUFA in the collection of papers that appear in Gagnon and Segal (2001). Both the Saskatoon Consensus and the Victoria Proposal are reprinted in the appendices to this volume.

28 For instance, Evan Potter explains that when Peter Harder arrived at the Treasury Board in late 1995 as the new Secretary, he saw the importance of countering the growing public distrust of government and was a strong proponent of public accountability. See Potter (2000, pp. 115-116).

29 The wording of the Victoria Proposal was: "[to provide citizens with] appropriate opportunities for public input in developing priorities and objectives for social programs."

30 One example of this is the National Child Benefit (NCB), which is often heralded as an example of federal-provincial cooperation. As Boychuk observes, the NCB did not result from a public desire, nor was it sold to the public. Rather, it was the result of pragmatic politics, designed to sell the provinces on the agreement. Boychuk (2000, p. 47). See also Jenson (2000, pp. 48-50).

31 The former was not part of the Victoria Proposal, while the latter was, in a section on promoting individual and collective responsibility.

32 Lazar (2000*b*, p. 4).

33 It should be noted that the Saskatoon Consensus made no mention of citizen accountability, leaving this issue to the regular mechanisms of accountability in a parliamentary democracy. See Otis (2001).

34 Lazar (2000*a*, p. 109).

35 Otis (2001, pp. 96-100).

36 This interest in results-based management was manifest both formally at the institutional level and at the personal level. It is interesting to note that Alex Himmelfarb, who had been Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Board Secretariat when results-based management was being developed, became chief federal negotiator for SUFA.

37 See Otis (2001, pp. 103, 116-119). At the time, rationalization was a popular idea in several provincial jurisdictions, notably Alberta and Ontario, which had recently completed processes of streamlining or disentangling provincial-municipal relations.

38 The Compact negotiated between the Blair government and the voluntary sector in England (with separate framework agreements negotiated in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) includes a code of good practice for consultation. It stipulates that a minimum of 12 weeks be allowed for replies in written consultations, to accommodate the work cycles of voluntary organizations. Were the English code applied to citizen engagement in the review and renewal of SUFA, and assuming that governments would need at least a month to analyze and publish the results of such a consultation, they would have had to produce the questions and documents on which they are inviting comment no later than September 2001. See Home Office and Working Group on Government Relations (2000).

39 There have been several attempts, both positive and negative, to involve citizens as individuals. The economic summits in Alberta and Quebec were constructive exercises in building a broad base of participation. See Abele et al. (1998). The

federal government's Task Force on Violence Against Women in the early 1990s was a less positive exercise: individual women recounted their experiences of violence at length, while representatives of rape crisis centres, shelters and women's groups had limited input, yet their extensive expertise in service delivery would have contributed greatly to the discussion.

40 Jenson and Phillips (1996, p. 124).

41 Noël (2001). See also Savoie (1999, pp. 344-350).

42 See Graves (1999, pp. 38-39).

43 Lazar (2000*a*, p. 110).

44 These differences are independent of the ideology of the governing party, as both New Democratic (e.g., Saskatchewan) and Conservative governments (e.g., Alberta) have been attempting to improve their relationships with the voluntary sector and with citizens. The critical factors seem to be the degree of centralization of power in the Premier's Office and the premier's view of the role of citizens and civil society.

45 Thompson with Maxwell and Stroick (1999, pp. 12-15).

46 Savoie (2000, pp. 10-11).

47 See Gibbins (2001).

48 Otis (2001, pp. 100-113).

49 Perhaps the two provinces that have taken outcome measurement the furthest are Alberta and Ontario. Alberta has been a leader in developing indicators for its health-care system, and Ontario is in the process of producing outcome-based measurement for education.

50 The National Child Benefit is often cited by Ottawa as what might be achieved under SUFA, but in fact it predates SUFA. The accountability and reporting frameworks associated with the NCB were emulated in the National Children's Agenda which followed.

51 Jenson with Thompson (1999).

52 See Thompson with Maxwell and Stroick (1999).

53 See Government of Canada (1997).

54 There was also a supplementary document addressing measurement and indicators of children's well-being.

55 *Developing a Shared Vision*, produced in collaboration with the five national Aboriginal organizations, also includes an Aboriginal perspective on children's issues.

56 The $1-million cost of the consultations was covered jointly as well: half was paid by the federal government and half was divided among the provinces and territories according to a formula. For a discussion of the consultation see F. Leslie Seidle (2000, pp. 11-13).

57 For a description of the process and report of results, see Government of Canada (1997). This has become a standard formula for federal consultations. See Phillips (1991); and Mendelsohn and McLean (2000*a*).

58 In commitments announced in the 1999 Speech from the Throne, the federal government has undertaken a number of specific initiatives with regard to children and families. These are outlined on the HRDC website: www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/minister/hrdc/invest.shtml

59 Quebec did not sign because sections of the Agreement infringe on its constitutional jurisdiction over social matters. It should be noted that Quebec is a leader in programs for children and families.

60 First Ministers' Meeting (2000).

61 The Agreement sensitively notes that the different starting points of provinces should be taken into account when reporting on these indicators.

62 The most influential of these was McCain and Mustard (1999).

63 See Pal (1995); and Jenson and Phillips (1996).

64 Mahon and Phillips (forthcoming).

65 Personal communication.

66 The largest ongoing exercise in relationship-building is the Voluntary Sector

Initiative (VSI) launched by the federal government in June 2000, a commitment of almost $95 million to a variety of programs whose objective is to strengthen the sector itself and its relationship with government. Implementation is overseen by an array of "Joint Tables" that are themselves experiments in collaboration. See Phillips (2001). Almost a third of VSI's funding is allocated to short-term projects aimed at equipping voluntary organizations to better engage with the federal government and encouraging departments to involve them. When SUFA was being negotiated most provinces ignored the voluntary sector except as a contractor of services. Over the past two years, however, a number of provinces and municipalities have undertaken major initiatives towards building more effective state-sector partnerships. In several provinces these initiatives have already begun to generate more innovative means for involving voluntary organizations in the policy process.

67 These include, for instance, loose, diverse coalitions in British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario and local chambers of voluntary organizations in Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa. Quebec has longstanding mechanisms for dialogue within the voluntary and community sectors, resulting in much greater cohesion and organization at those levels than exists in the other provinces. See White (2001) and Vaillancourt (forthcoming).

Related Publications from IRPP:

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Alain-G. Gagnon and Hugh Segal (eds.), *The Canadian Social Union Without Quebec: 8 Critical Analyses* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2000).
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